

CD 2011--73/74



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
FACULTY OF MUSIC

CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES

**Lara St. John, violin**

Wilma and Clifford Smith Visitor in Music

**Monday, September 26, 2011**

**7:30 p.m. Walter Hall**

**Edward Johnson Building**

**80 Queen's Park**

**2011-12 SEASON**

**LARA ST. JOHN, VIOLIN**  
Wilma and Clifford Smith Visitor in Music  
**Matt Herskowitz, piano**

PROGRAM

**Sonata in A for violin and piano**

**César Franck**  
1822-1890

- 1 Allegretto ben moderato
- 2 Allegro
- 3 Recitativo - Fantasia (ben moderato)
- 4 Allegretto poco mosso

→ 79/1k  
5. **STOMP for solo violin** (*Toronto premiere*)

**John Corigliano**  
b.1938

INTERMISSION

**Violin Sonata in G minor**

**Claude Debussy**  
1862-1918

- 1 Allegro vivo
- 2 Intermède: Fantasque et léger
- 3 Finale: Très animé
4. Talk

9. **Freilach No. 19**

**Matt Herskowitz**  
b.1968

10. **Russian Evening Suite**
5. Moscow (*world premiere*)
6. Song
7. Falling
8. Talk

**Gene Pritsker**  
b.1972

10. **Ca La Breaza**

**Traditional/Michael Atkinson**

11. **Encore**

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# Program Notes

CÉSAR FRANCK (1822-1890)

## **Sonata in A, for violin and piano (1886)**

Not wishing to repeat himself, Franck tended to write just one work in each of the major forms. He was 57 years old when his Piano Quintet heralded a remarkable series of compositions for which he is now chiefly remembered. First came the *Prélude, Chorale et Fugue* of 1884. This majestic piano work was followed by the Symphonic Variations for piano and orchestra, the D minor Symphony, the String Quartet, and the Sonata in A, we'll be hearing today. As in much of his music, Franck does not pursue traditional sonata procedures in the sonata. He follows Franz Liszt's lead by using recurring themes across all four movements. Franck's cyclic development transforms a thematic idea throughout the entire work, rather than developing different ideas movement by movement in the way we find in the majority of sonatas by Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms. The expansively lyrical violin melody of the first movement is built out of a sequence of thirds – this interval will feature prominently throughout the sonata. The driving second movement has the momentum and scale of the traditional sonata first movement. The final two movements contrast the rhapsodic freedom of a Recitativo – Fantasia, which replaces the traditional scherzo, with the discipline of a canonic finale, where the familiar theme is passed back and forth between the two instruments in a virtuoso way. Franck's heady, deeply emotional writing and piquant harmonic turns have their origins in the musical language of Wagner, particularly the harmonies of

*Tristan*. The music-making of Franck's fellow-countryman, the violinist Eugène Ysaÿe, provided an incentive for the piece which Franck wrote as a wedding present. Ysaÿe gave the première in December 1886 in an art gallery in Brussels. The program was long and, after the first movement, the late afternoon light began to dim. Artificial lighting was not allowed in the gallery. So, with a cry of *Allons! Allons!*, Ysaÿe and his pianist threw aside the music and performed the last three movements from memory.

JOHN CORIGLIANO (B. 1938)

## **STOMP, for solo violin (2010)**

American composer John Corigliano wrote STOMP for the XIV International Tchaikovsky Competition in St. Petersburg this past June. Invited to be a member of the violin jury, Corigliano knew that existing repertoire would readily demonstrate a competitor's ability to handle the fiddle. What he wished to test was a performer's "imagination, intelligence and musicality by offering interesting new problems to solve." His six-minute, unaccompanied imposed piece challenges the performer with several traditions of violin playing, calling for technical virtuosity and showmanship in equal measure. "STOMP poses its player three problems; of ear, style, and coordination," Corigliano says. "First, the violin's outer two strings are tuned to non-standard pitches. This mis-tuning (*scordatura*) deepens the instrument's range, and replaces the usual perfect fifths between strings with grating dissonances high and low. Second, the piece is modelled not on classical precedents, but on American fiddle music—bluegrass

and jazz. And third, as in fiddle playing, the violinist must periodically stomp with his or her foot along with the music. So STOMP demands a theatrical mind, an unerring ear, and a delight in making music with the entire body. It is supposed to be fun for the audience and a workout for the soloists."

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

### **Sonata for violin and piano (1917)**

The First World War was a miserable time for Debussy. He was in his early Fifties, weakened by cancer, anxious about his son and other family members who were on the battlefield. "I have no *sang-froid* and even less military spirit, never having had occasion to handle a gun," he wrote at the outbreak of the hostilities. For a year he was unable to compose and turned to editing to secure the advances against royalties he needed in order to live. (He found little pleasure in revising Bach's violin sonatas). Then, in the summer of 1915, he wrote to a friend about "a cello sonata, and another sonata for flute, viola and harp in the traditional, flexible mould, with none of the grandiloquence of modern sonatas. There are going to be six of them," he added, "for different groups of instruments . . ."

Of these six planned sonatas, Debussy completed just three. In them, he consciously rejected the Austro-German romanticism that he found so distasteful during the war. He also discovered his heritage in the music of the French keyboard composers of the 18th century – *clavicinistes* like Rameau and Couperin. Acknowledging tradition even more, he signed the sonatas, with national pride, "Claude Debussy, Musicien Français." Debussy began work on the project with grim determination, as he wrote

on August 5, 1915, "not so much for my own sake as to prove in some small way that not 30 million *Boches* could destroy French thought, even though they had attempted to degrade it before annihilating it."

Debussy's health took a turn for the worse after he had completed the second of the sonatas -- for flute, viola and harp. He had surgery and radiation treatments. The medium of his next sonata, for violin and piano, proved a stumbling block to inspiration. A decade earlier he confessed to a friend, the American violinist Arthur Hartmann: "I do not understand violin music and I do not like the combination of violin and piano." Nevertheless, an idea for the finale eventually came to him, during a trip to Cap F  ret in October 1916. By the following February, the first two movements were in place. The rest followed with difficulty. Like its two companions, the roots of the Sonata for violin and piano are firmly in the past though the elusive, fleeting music is forward-looking in idiom. "By one of those very human contradictions it's full of happiness and uproar," he wrote at the time. Although acutely sick with cancer, in low spirits, and finding himself "fighting for a lump of sugar or for manuscript paper, not to mention

## **Lara St. John Master Class**

**Tuesday, September 27**

1:30-3:30 pm. Walter Hall

**Wednesday, September 28**

7:00-9:00 pm. Walter Hall

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my daily bread," Debussy gave the first performance May 5, 1917, with the violinist Gaston Poulet. Less than a year later, as the German guns were pounding Paris, Debussy died. The Violin Sonata, innovative in form, extrovert in spirit, was to be his final work.

MATT HERSKOWITZ (B. 1968)

### **Freilach No. 19, for violin and piano**

In Klezmer music, the *freilach* (or *freylekh*) dance is characterised by its upbeat, festive mood and 3+3+2 rhythm. Matt Herskowitz writes of his seven-minute piece: "The treatment of the theme is a bit the antithesis of a *freilach* – not happy and dancy, but more brooding, quasi Arab-sounding. The middle section with the ostinato is a counterpoint to that, a wild dance that builds to an ecstatic feverish frenzy. At the climax, the theme enters again in a more declamatory, 'victorious' manner, a bit faster than the opening. The coda ends the piece on a lighter note with a grand virtuosic flourish, referencing the grand finales of traditional *freilachs* and other Jewish, Eastern European, or Roma musical dance forms. Indian music often does the same thing. The subtle combination of Jewish and Arab musical styles seems to work well in this *freilach*, although the emphasis is more toward the Jewish side."

GENE PRITSKER (B. 1972)

### **Russian Evening Suite, for violin and piano**

New York based composer/guitarist/rapper Gene Pritsker has written over 400 compositions, including chamber operas, orchestral and chamber works, electro-acoustic music, songs for hip-hop and rock ensembles. According to his website, all his compositions employ

an eclectic spectrum of styles and are influenced by his studies of various musical cultures. He is founder and leader of the genre-bending band *Sound Liberation*.

Gene Pritsker writes: "The three movements of the *Russian Evening Suite* are all based on melodies from my birth country of Russia. Each has the word 'evening' in its original song title.

The first movement, *Moscow*, is based on the famous Soviet melody *Under the Evenings of Moscow* (*Moscow Nights*). I remember this song very vividly from my childhood and have also seen it overused in America to represent Russia. I take this melody and play with its harmonic structure and constantly change genres to show how malleable it is. From a melancholy intro, which disguises the melody considerably, the music turns into a fast bebop-like jam alternating with a fast waltz feel. The movement ends with a typical Russian piano-bar virtuoso climax.

*Song* is based on the mid-20th century *Evening Song*, that I also remember hearing as a child. I always found this melody to be very beautiful and it has stayed with me throughout my life and brings back memories of my childhood in the Soviet Union. The song talks about Leningrad, the city in which I was born, in a very sentimental way. In this variation, I leave the basic melody intact, but re-harmonize it through my own language and develop it in various styles: jazz, lounge, impressionism. I leave the main essence of the music (as it lingers in my memory) but filter it through my experience (musical and life).

The last movement *Falling* is based on a gypsy tune called *Evening is Falling*. This melody was less known to me but somehow it sounded very familiar. Lara picked this one for me to work on and

I transcribed the female voice from the recording she gave me. This melody has that distinct sound of Russian gypsy music that is simple, free and yet deeply sad. I enjoyed playing with the tension and release of form in this movement, constantly bringing the music to a climax only to deliver it into a melancholy reflection.

TRAD. ARR. MICHAEL ATKINSON  
**Ca la breaza**

Lara St John writes: "I first heard *Ca La Breaza* some years ago on my scratchy

old '78' recording of Toni Iordache, the Romanian hammered dulcimer (cimbalom) player. Although a lot of Romanian gypsy music is very fleet, this one actually always left me breathless – think I would hold my breath till the end, unwittingly. When I decided to have it transcribed for violin and piano, I added in a lot of *ricochet* (flying *spiccato*) in varying rhythms, partly to create that hammer effect, and partly so I would, in fact, be winded at the end."

Notes © 2011 Keith Horner. Comments welcomed: [khnotes@sympatico.ca](mailto:khnotes@sympatico.ca)

## Biographies

Canadian-born violinist **Lara St. John** has been described as "something of a phenomenon" by *The Strad* and a "high-powered soloist" by the *New York Times*.

In North America, she has performed as soloist with numerous orchestras including Cleveland, Philadelphia, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and the Boston Pops. In Europe, she has played with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, NDR Symphony (Hanover), Zurich Chamber Orchestra, Ensemble Orchestral de Paris, Bournemouth Symphony, and the Amsterdam Symphony, among others. In Asia, solo appearances have included the Hong Kong Philharmonic, Tokyo Symphony, China Philharmonic in Beijing, Guangzhou Symphony and the Shanghai Broadcasting Orchestra. Lara has also performed in Australia and Turkey.

The *Los Angeles Times* has written, "St. John brings to the stage personal charisma, an unflagging musical imagination and genuine passion." Recitals in major concert halls have included New York, Boston, San

Francisco, Ravinia, Washington DC, Prague, Berlin, Toronto, Montreal, and in the Forbidden City.

Lara has made eight recordings. Her most recent recording Mozart featuring the *Sinfonia Concertante* and *Concerti Nos. 1 & 3* with her brother Scott St. John and The Knights won the 2011 Juno Classical Album of the Year for Soloist with Large Ensemble. *The Wholenote* wrote that it "... simply can't imagine a more satisfying recording of this glorious work."

Her recording with the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela and conductor Eduardo Marturet *VIVALDI – The Four Seasons and Piazzolla – The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* reached No. 2 on the iTunes charts on its first day and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* said, "Lara St. John is as captivating in the seductive scenes of the Piazzolla as she is crisp, caressing and colorful in Vivaldi's atmospheric paeans to nature." *Audiophile Audition* stated "Do we need another *Four Seasons*? With playing and sound like this, yes we do!"

Of her third recording, *Bach: the Concerto Album*, *Gramophone* wrote, "It is



difficult to argue with such a technically dazzling and unfailingly musical interpretation." When the recording was released on iTunes, it immediately reached No. 1 in the classical category.

Lara began playing the violin when she was two years old. She made her first appearance as soloist with orchestra at age four, and her European debut with the Gulbenkian Orchestra in Lisbon when she was 10. She toured Spain, France, Portugal and Hungary at ages 12 and 13, entered the Curtis Institute at 13, and spent her first summer at Marlboro three years later. Her teachers have included Felix Galimir and Joey Corpus.

She performs on the 1779 "Salabue" Guadagnini thanks to an anonymous donor and Heintz & Co. of Toronto.

Pianist, composer, songwriter and arranger, **Matt Herskowitz's** multifaceted career has led to a unique and personal voice in music. His latest album, *Jerusalem Trilogy*, featuring his original works and arrangements in his signature fusion of contemporary jazz and classical styles, received a Juno nomination for "Best Contemporary Jazz Album of the Year". His 2007 solo piano release, *Matt Herskowitz Plays Gershwin*, was nominated for Quebec's prestigious Prix

Opus. It also made Montreal's prominent quotidian *La Presse's* list of top 10 jazz albums of the year. His 2006 solo release, *Gabriel's Message*, which features his original arrangements and compositions based on popular Christmas themes, was nominated for Québec's prestigious Félix award in 2007.

Matt's performance of his jazz arrangement of Bach's Prelude in C minor on the soundtrack of the Grammy-nominated film *The Triplets of Belleville* has earned him much popular and critical acclaim. Matt also recorded a solo improvisation in Robert Lepage's film *La Face Cachée de la Lune* in 2003. In 1997 Matt won first prize at the Orford International Piano Competition, which led to his recording of Glazunov's 2nd Piano Concerto with I Musici de Montreal for Chandos Records in 1998. The recording was hailed by *The Strad* as "by far the best recording on disc." In 2010, Matt performed his piano concerto, *Undertow*, with Absolute Ensemble in Cologne, Germany, which was broadcast on WDR German television.

A graduate of the Juilliard School and the Curtis Institute of Music, Matt is originally from Albany, New York, and has made Montreal his adopted home of 12 years.



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